

Abroad

Baghdad

Up the Escalator

The imminent arrival of five French Super-Étendard fighter planes equipped with the deadly Exocet missile of Falkland Island fame is anticipated here with ominous satisfaction. These weapons could seriously alter the character of the three-year-old Iraq-Iran war, converting its long stalemate into an international crisis. France is deeply committed to financing the Iraqi military machine, and the new aircraft will give the Iraqis an immense advantage over their opponents. Specifically, the Super-Étendards will be capable of ranging over vast stretches of the Persian Gulf. Their air-to-ship missiles, which blew more than one British warship out of the water in the South Atlantic, could do the same to the biggest of the international tankers. The planes have in-flight refueling capacity, which means they could dominate the northern Gulf and freely launch attacks on Kharg Island, where the biggest Iranian oil-loading facilities are located. Blowing up a tanker at Kharg could spark an immense conflagration. By extension, such tactics could close the narrow straits that form the mouth of the Gulf by the simple expedient of sinking ships as blockades. President Carter, while in office, said that if the straits were closed, the United States would act; nothing has happened since to change that position. Other nations' warships, notably French and British, would also inevitably be affected if supplies from the Gulf were cut off. Insurance rates would skyrocket, and commercial shipping lines would refuse to risk their property and the lives of their crews to load oil in the vicinity of the Gulf. Some observers say that the chief value of the French planes in Iraq is to blackmail Iran into settling the war that has cost Iraq so much money and prestige. Nevertheless, the introduction of so much new military potential into the area is seen as a cause for alarm.

Bogotá

Hispanidad

The great colonial fortress of Cartagena, the bastion and treasure house of the Spanish Main, is celebrating the 450th anniversary of its foundation by the soldiers of the Conquest. Who should be the guest of honor of the Republic of Colombia but Felipe, Prince of the Asturias and heir to the throne of Spain? Tall, slender, poised beyond his 15 years, wearing the badge of the Order of the Golden Fleece, the prince won the admiration of the descendants of his ancestors' once far-flung American empire. "You can be proud of your prince," novelist Gabriel García Márquez, not notably a royalist, told Spanish journalists. "He has carried out the duties of his father, the king, and we are proud that it is here at Cartagena that he has had his international 'coming out.'" Meanwhile the father in question, King Juan Carlos, was named winner of the first Simón Bolívar prize, given by UNESCO for outstanding contributions toward international understanding, because of his "symbolic acts on behalf of Hispanic reconciliation." The king has also traveled widely in South America. New emphasis is thus being attached to the historic, cultural, and

emotional ties between Spain and its former possessions in the Western Hemisphere.

Mexico

Central American Maneuvers

Three of the four Contadora countries, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela—the fourth is Colombia—continue to show steady support for the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Observers here believe that the strategy behind this attitude is to stave off any direct intervention in Nicaraguan affairs until the general staff has accumulated an extra stock of Soviet and Eastern European arms. Some even think the delay is designed to permit Castro to ferry over a stronger contingent of Cuban troops: Castro's offer to go slow in Nicaragua if the United States also de-escalates is interpreted as a classic Leninist tactic of one step backward for every two steps forward. It is considered significant, furthermore, that the four countries, while urging the government of El Salvador to deal directly with its rebels, are silent on a similar proposal with respect to Nicaragua. The Central American nations' governments are under obligation to Mexico because, under the terms of the San José treaty, Mexico and Venezuela supply them with petroleum at a 20 per cent discount.

Southampton

If You Have to Ask . . .

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia has ordered himself a huge new yacht that is likely to be as spectacular as anything afloat. Now being fitted out under tight security here, the yacht was built up to its outer shell in Copenhagen; then it was towed here for outfitting—which alone will cost about \$15 million. Named the *Abdul Aziz*, the white, twin-funnelled ship is close to five hundred feet long and is equipped with diesel engines that will give her a speed of 22 knots. She will have a helicopter pad, a hospital with an intensive-care unit, saunas, a swimming pool, bullet-proof portholes and windows, carved marble bathtubs with gold faucets, private apartments for the royal family, and other accommodations for sixty guests. The *Abdul Aziz* is expected to sail for Arabia early next year.



Hawker, *Punch*

Reitco

"And then suddenly the sun breaks through and their human-rights record doesn't seem so bad at all."